

# Anatomy of a Road

*Resident Engineer Jeff Gander:*

*"Station 1 to Station 17, what is your status?"*

*Senior Construction Inspector Shane Viers:*

*"This is Station 17. We're ready."*

*Gander:*

*"Station 1 to Station 17, please begin escorting traffic up the new northbound lanes."*

With that simple announcement, years of planning, property acquisition, design and construction culminated in 15 miles of four-lane highway from the Boone County line to Moberly. As a result, 66 miles of Route 63, one of central Missouri's most-traveled thoroughfares, is now a smooth, four-lane highway from Jefferson City to Moberly.

## Planning and Communication

The opening of a new roadway, however, is not as simple as an announcement over a CB radio or the snip of giant scissors at a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Opening new lanes on a major highway presents safety concerns, public relations challenges and logistical difficulties.

"Planning for a road opening must begin years in advance with the design of the

project," says Mike Herleth, assistant district engineer at MoDOT's North Central Missouri office in Macon. "Highway designers work closely with the engineers in charge of constructing the new roadway to develop the best way to safely transition from a two-lane to a four-lane facility."

At the same time, construction engineers set out expectations for the contractor hired to build the project. The contractor is expected to maximize safety, limit inconvenience to motorists and meet the established completion date. MoDOT construction engineers and inspectors monitor the project from start to finish to make sure the contractor adheres to these guidelines.



**Macon Area Engineer Dennis Brucks and Resident Engineer Jeff Gander prepare to open the new lanes.**

The engineer in charge also works with MoDOT public information staff to communicate with motorists and residents who will be affected by the construction. This information is conveyed through news releases, media interviews, e-mails, meetings with individuals and groups who will be impacted, message boards on the existing lanes and other tools.

"Keeping the lines of communication open with the public is imperative to driver safety and convenience," says Macon Area Engineer Dennis Brucks. "If we have to close a frequently used intersection or limit traffic to one lane, people must be aware of these changes."



# Opening

By Shane Peck

As the project nears completion, public-information efforts intensify in frequency and depth. Included in this information will be a tentative date for opening the new lanes. In many cases, a ceremony also will be scheduled to celebrate the opening of a prominent project.

In the case of Route 63, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was scheduled for the date the new lanes were expected to open. But approximately seven inches of rain in one week temporarily halted construction. The ceremony went on as planned, but the actual opening was delayed about two weeks.

## Opening the Roadway

Working from a four-page "Plan for Opening Northbound Lanes," Brucks coordinated efforts from atop a new overpass at Route 22, at the southern end of the new 15-mile section. The first vehicles would be allowed on the new lanes just south of this location.



MoDOT workers put up signage along the two new lanes of Route 63.



At the opening ceremony, employees present a sign designating the route as the Pearl Harbor Memorial Highway.

Other information might include the progress of construction, cost of the project or details about methods used to build the new highway. Sharing these facts helps illustrate MoDOT's accountability to its customers and satisfies the general curiosity that accompanies major road construction.

"It is difficult to pinpoint a date for opening a roadway very far in advance," Brucks says. "Many factors that are beyond MoDOT's control, most commonly the weather, can delay completion."

Brucks' plan detailed tasks that had been completed in the weeks preceding the opening, and the duties that had to be carried out just prior to and during the opening. While crews moved quickly to install and uncover signs, Brucks and Gander

### Tasks to be completed on June 13, prior to opening:

- ☐ Remind all radio users to refrain from using radio from 1:00 to 3:00 (Customer service will do this)
- ☐ Hold a quick meeting with everyone involved in opening. (12:00 at the maintenance building)
- ☐ Contractor will continue to install signs and uncover signs.
- ☐ Contractor will close Co. Rd. 2720 (Botkins) and Co. Rd. 2790 (near old roadside park) until later in the day to eliminate need for a flagger at those two locations.
- ☐ All should have orange hats and vests.





**Crews set up the podium, chairs and displays in preparation for the ceremony.**



**Cutting the ceremonial ribbon are (l-r): Congressman Kenny Hulshof, Senator Kit Bond, Governor Bob Holden, State Sen. Ken Jacob, State Rep. Nancy Copenhaver, and Moberly Mayor Lawrence Rucker.**



**The pristine new highway, moments before it's opened to vehicles.**

communicated with employees stationed at 17 intersections along the highway.

The flaggers at the intersections were instructed to stop vehicles and inform drivers that traffic was about to be allowed onto the new lanes. When time came for the opening, the flaggers would ensure the motorists headed the correct direction on the highway.

“Communicating with the public is vital in advance of a road opening,” Gander says. “But there’s no substitute for personal contact during and after the opening to make sure that drivers safely access a new project.”

One by one, the flaggers reported that all was clear at their locations. When the final station said, “We’re ready,” Gander gave the order to release traffic onto four-lane Route 63 for the first time.

### Ensuring Safe Passage

Honking horns and waves from motorists indicated they were pleased with the newly opened four-lane highway. Work for the

highway crews, however, was not yet finished.

Three new interchanges that were part of the project had yet to be completed. Public information efforts also continued.

“Four-lane highways provide safer driving conditions than two-lane facilities, but it takes drivers a little while to become accustomed to the new traffic patterns,” says Brucks. “It is vital that we provide clear indication that the highway is divided so that drivers will be extra cautious.”

Brucks had special, bright orange signs produced indicating that the new lanes were open. The signs were placed at every location where drivers could get onto Route 63. Other signs and message boards also urged caution and instructed motorists on the correct way to access the highway.

Members of highway crews even spoke with drivers at busy access points to make sure they got on the correct lanes and headed in the right direction. At the same time,

MoDOT public information and outreach staff continued to inform the public through the media, e-mails and meetings.

In the end, the opening went off without a hitch, and all work on the interchanges was completed in August. No major accidents were reported after the new lanes opened.

“It is always gratifying to complete a project that will provide safer, more convenient travel,” Brucks says. “In this case, I was doubly pleased because the opening of the new lanes happened safely and ahead of the scheduled date.”

Randolph County’s expanded Route 63 has changed a lot since it was part of the old Bee Trace road the early settlers traveled in search of honey. Today the new 15-mile, four-lane section accommodates the 12,000 vehicles that travel the route daily with greater convenience, accessibility and safety. ■

*Shane Peck is Public Information and Outreach manager in MoDOT’s North Central District.*

